A "Civilizing Mission" ? The discovery of Harappa in the Shadow of Empire.

Shahfarman Gowher

The advent of europeans in India marked the beginning of colonialism , Industrial setups, Drain of Wealth , and other phenomenas in the sub continent . The arrival of "Governor and Company of Merchants of London and Trading into East Indies " later called East India Company Or John Company in 1600 within very less time spread their trade and military activities across the states known for their trade , resources , or markets . After the arrival of British company their motive swiftly shifted from trade to cololizing the country and became successful in doing so by removing their only equal compitators "French East India company" from the political affairs of the sub continent.

Ruling the people of India wasn't an easy task for British. After East India Company transitioned from a trading entity to a territorial ruler following the battle of plassey {1757} they faced a major problem in administrating the vast population whose laws , customs and language they did not understand . To collect taxex , maintain law and order they needed to know the local laws. To accomplish the task of being seen as the "protector" and the "interpreters' of ancient india tradition and to justify their rule the institution like "the asiatic society of bengal" by William Jones was established inorder to translate the scripts like Vedas , Manusmritis {primary text to interpret hindu law},plays of Kalidas; etc.

British commentators made no attempt to understand these texts on their own terms. Instead they judged them against the standards of European rationality , leading to ignorant misinterpretation . The rich mythological stories in purans and epics like Maharbarta were dissmissed as childish "fables" and 'superstition". The British used the translations to identify practices they deemed "barbaric"as core part of their "civilizing mission"=" The White Man's Burden ".

James Mill's "The History of British India" , Thomas Babington Macaulay 's " Minute on Indian Education " are two among many sources indicating the image of Indians as Uncivilized, Backward ,Snake Charmers , and quoting " a single shelf of good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia " was something people of india opposed , but had no strong evidence to prove British wrong.

For much of the 19th century , the British Raj in india justified its colonial domination of india through the powerful ideology of"White Man's Burden " . However this carefully constructed view was profoundly disrupted in the 1920s with astonishing archeological discovery of the Harrapan Civilization under a Britisher himself " Alexander Cunningam"founder of ASI . The unearthing of meticulously planned cities like Harappa and Mohanjedaro , boasting advanced urban engineering , intricated art and undeciphered script ,presented irrefutable evidence of a sophisticated indegenous bronze age culture that predated the european influence .

The burden on Cunningam and his peers was not one of civilizing a people without history , but of confronting their own profound error . The stones of Harappa , which he first noted in 1853 and which would later exploade into view under his sucessors , became the weight that crushed a

prejudiced narrative . At the end the white man of ASI , following the path Cunningam had blazed , did not shoulder a civilizing burden , but lifted from his own shoulders the immense weight of a colonial myth - a burden that had never truly exixted!